

The Testaments: A Time's Up Quarrel Between Totalitarianism And Feminism

Sheeba

Research Scholar,
CCS University, Meerut, U.P.

Abstract

After the fifteen years the events of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood represents an ethnic quarrel between the *Feminism* and *Totalitarianism* which's time is up as with the ideal idea of *Feminism of India*. With the long-time of thirty-five years Atwood made possible answers to repeated question of *The Handmaid's Tale: How did Gilead (the epitome of Totalitarianism) fall?* and the answers now changed as society itself has changed, where possibilities have become actualities. As Bible helps to subordinate women in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the weighty tome X-rated(prohibited) book: Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: A Defence of One's Life* serves women to choose their life and title advisedly. Novel's complex is double-edged though victory has to date with Aunt Lydia. Atwood re-romanced to make clear that women are usurping leadership positions, they are making attempt not to reoffend.

Keywords: Atwood, Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, Feminism



The book '*The Testaments*', 2019 Booker Prize winner is expected as I thought there were all possible chances that it should reflect the temptation to crew something out to cash in on the recently renewed focus on the Handmaid's Tale. The book is much more inspirational fun to read than its predecessor. It details what happens after The Handmaid's tale and the perspectives of three women, Aunt Lydia; the narrator of the novel, Agnes Jemima and, Baby Nicole to them following chapters are distributed like The Ardua Hall Holograph (Aunt Lydia), Transcript of Witness Testimony 369A (Agnes Jemima), and Transcript of Witness Testimony 369B (Baby Nicole/Daisy). The biblical angel number 369 is chosen to give a message that all positive affirmations and prayers of Gileadean women have been acknowledged by the Universe and it can be expected that their impulses to become manifesting into reality. With these numbers the angels are asking us to maintain a positive outlook on future.

The development of the plot continues as here in *The Testaments*, the commanded robot of dystopian Gilead Aunt Lydia, who survives from Handmaid's Tale, past is discovered she was a divorced judge, was imprisoned with other women in a stadium during the establishment of Gilead. After enduring weeks of squalid conditions and solitary confinement, she and a small group of other women were handpicked by Commander Judd and Vidala, a pre-existing supporter of Gilead, to become Aunts—an elite group of women tasked with creating and overseeing the laws and uniforms governing Gilead's women. The novel is a memoir of Aunt Lydia which is

discovered concealed in a cavity cut into a forbidden copy of Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* long after the fall of Gilead that develops the central spine of the narrative. The Aunts used Ardua Hall as their headquarters and enjoy certain privileges that include reading "forbidden" texts, such as Cardinal John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: A Defence of One's Life*. In secret, Aunt Lydia despises Gilead's totalitarian attitude and becomes a mole supplying critical information to the Mayday resistance organization. Fifteen years after the events of *The Handmaid's Tale*, a girl named Agnes Jemima is growing up in Boston as the adopted daughter of Commander Kyle and his wife Tabitha. Agnes has a loving relationship with Tabitha, who later dies of ill health. Agnes and her classmates Becka and Shunammite attend an elite preparatory school for the daughters of Commanders, where they are taught to run a household, but not to become literate, these schools were to make illiterate women not to literates. Once widowed, Commander Kyle marries Paula, the widow of a deceased Commander, who despises Agnes. She acquires a Handmaid to conceive a child (a son, Mark) for herself, and arranges for Agnes to be married to Commander Judd, now a high-ranking official in charge of the Eyes and surveilling the population of Gilead.

Agnes later learns that she is the daughter of a Handmaid. She manages to escape her arranged marriage by becoming a Supplicant, a prospective Aunt. In that pursuit she joins Becka, whose father—Doctor Grove, a prominent dentist—has been sexually abusing her and his other underage female patients for years. Later, Agnes is anonymously provided with files highlighting the corruption and hypocrisy at the heart of Gilead, specifically evidence of adultery between Commander Kyle and Paula and their respective uxoricide and mariticide of their spouses (because divorce having been prohibited in Gilead). She also learns that she is the half-sister of "Baby Nicole," a girl who was smuggled out of Gilead to Canada by her Handmaid mother when she was young (and whose return the government of Gilead has been demanding. Meanwhile, a girl named Daisy—several years younger than Agnes—grows up in Toronto's Queen Street West with her adoptive parents, Neil and Melanie. The couple owns a second-hand clothes shop serving as a front for Mayday to smuggle women out of Gilead. On her 16th birthday, Daisy's adoptive parents are murdered by undercover Gilead operatives. Daisy is spirited into hiding by several Mayday operatives, who reveal that Daisy is actually Nicole. The Mayday operatives enlist her in a mission to infiltrate Gilead in order to obtain valuable intelligence from their mysterious mole. Nicole poses as a street urchin Jade in order to be recruited by the Pearl Girls (Gilead missionaries who lure foreign women to Gilead with the promise of a better life), who takes her up and brings her into Gilead.

The disguised Nicole is kept under the care of Agnes and Becka, who are now respectively named Aunts Victoria and Immortelle. Aunt Lydia confirms that "Jade" is Nicole through a tattoo and discloses her true identity and parentage to Agnes and Becka. Revealing herself as Mayday's mole, Aunt Lydia enlists the three young women to smuggle incriminating information about Gilead's elite into Canada. Nicole is tasked with carrying the files inside a microdot on her tattoo. Agnes and Nicole are to enter Canada disguised as Pearl Girls, with Nicole impersonating Becka. The real Becka, disguised as Jade, is to remain at the Hall and provide a diversion once Nicole was found missing. Forced to hasten their plans when Commander Judd learns about Nicole's presence, Agnes and Nicole set out early, travelling by bus, then by boat along the Penobscot River. This boat takes them to a larger vessel which brings them into Canadian waters. Agnes and Nicole manage to reach Campobello Island by an inflatable and picked up by a Mayday team. Using the information inside Nicole's microdot, the Canadian media leaks scandalous information about Gilead's elite, which leads to a purge that in turn causes a military coup, bringing about the collapse of Gilead and the subsequent restoration of the United States. Agnes and Nicole are reunited with their mother. Meanwhile, Aunt Lydia commits suicide by overdosing herself with morphine before she can be arrested and executed. Becka died while hiding in a cistern to perpetuate the ruse that "Jade" had run off with a plumber.

Detailing the stories of women is fundamental in this series of novels which is symbolized by the women's practicing of embroidery, one of the few acceptable means of expression for women in the male dominion of totalitarian society. Aunt Lydia pays her valediction to the audience at the end of the novel and refers to Marry Queen of Scots' motto: 'In My End is My Beginning' and queen's needlework that shows 'A phoenix rising from its ashes' what links to Lydia's hope that her story will be rebirthed by her readers.

“The Testaments” is having relatable stories in the novel which; are the commentary on what happens in totalitarian Gilead and mentions to what occurred and is occurring in some parts of the world. One is the Biblical Levite’s Concubine’s story (Judges 19-21) which reopens the connection with the Handmaids, as the concubine has no name and is a sexual partner or a wife with a secondary status and shows, in general perspective, the women’s status in totalitarian Gilead and in modern society women are totally subordinated and traded like animals. Women’s sexual violation is to be considered unavoidable in certain situations, it is avenged afterwards, that, in the concubine’s story is a pretext for a war against the Benjaminites who committed the crime. Seemingly, once the Pearl girls Becka and Agnes were able to read, they discover that what the Bible says is different from what the aunts taught them at school, finally, they come to know that Gileadean narratives are deceitful, so the two young women: Nicole and Agnes take action against the regime. Their shared view and commitment are reinforced by their bond of sisterhood that clarifies their position as women in a totalitarian society where everything is planned against women technically and mentally, where they might be used as scapegoats or cattle, traded or raped to death and cut into pieces. Agnes and Becka take a stance not only against the totalitarian-regime but also against their role in society which exploits women and uses them as animals. As approvingly Aunt Lydia remarks, “[M]en must make sacrifice in war, and women must make sacrifices in other ways”. These ‘Other Ways’ were not homely but to rearrange their status and statues socially.

Handmaid’s Tale is a controlled fear of totalitarian imagination meanwhile The Testaments is the objection in contrast to the guidance given to the women in totalitarian Gilead that women should stay at home, and should be obliged to breed and forbidden to learn to read and that heterosexuality should be implemented by a strategy of killing for gender treachery. The memoir, the sequel to *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *The Testaments*, details how Gilead conjures people in state for being a part of that totalitarian attitude willingly, not blaming others. As quoted in the book *The Testaments*;

They always appeared in twos. They had white pearl necklaces and smiled a lot, but not real smiling. They would offer Melanie their printed brochures with pictures of tidy streets, happy children, and sunrises, and titles that were supposed to lure you to Gilead: “Fallen? God Can Still Forgive You!” “Homeless? There Is a Home for You in Gilead.” ‘This place is weird as fuck’, The Testaments, p.274.

The treatment of women in totalitarian Gilead is practically contemptuous, women for them have become an object for correction, and an object to future development not to develop with women but all the correction and development in women aren’t done by themselves. Women do not need utopian solution in dystopian Gilead and, it would also probably have little success. They transform this ignorance, this indifference for others, into the positive idea they hold a secret inside them. The secret is to be ahead of men to be strong and to have strong status to post conquering the world with. In general, man experiences his abandonment in anguish, women do accept with passivity even from parents to husband. Man, never manages to abolish his separated self; at the least he wishes to achieve the solidity of the life in itself, to be petrified in things; it is uniquely when he is fixed by the gaze of others that he appears to himself as a being. Woman is an expected abolished object; she always wishes to represent emotionally and communally not socially or economically; when she is gazed by others, she fixes herself rejected. In young age boys do get find greater designers for themselves but girls are always forbidden to outside world because parents are their designers, standing position is reserved to males from urination to command, she has to squat down, remove some clothes and above all hide, a shameful and uncomfortable servitude. Virile prestige stands on solid economic and social bases, what women are lacking from ancient to modern. Women are having social concepts to follow but not socio-economic stands to stand with. Women do not need to be on eternal truths but of described on common grounds from which all totalitarianisms’ existence stems. Women’s life is in part a desire and in part a chance. Their silence must be determinated action not the fear. Women are secretive but they are not hypocrite.

“Feminist invents chair that castrates’ men who sit in it solving all feminist issues once and for all!”

There is nothing like Feminine seriousness so that our generation can think and take possession towards that role of women and female. Along with that we modern people do designing with our life by modifying or controlling everything even in human body. They can control birth and can-do abortion. In Gilead women are controlled by the commanders. But *The Testaments*, sequel to *The Handmaid’s Tale* gives idea that time of totalitarian attitude

have to be up soon. We are never given more than an inauthentic picture of Female, and in this inauthenticity, no criterion other than normality can possibly be found. The description of feminine destiny is, from this point of view, altogether striking. The way psychoanalysts understand it, 'to identify' with the mother or the father is to alienate oneself in a model, it is to prefer a foreign image to a spontaneous movement of one's existence, is to play at being. Critics do presume that Nazi Germany and Soviet Union resulted Totalitarianism. Classes transformed into masses the role of propaganda in dealing with the non-totalitarian world.

Totalitarianism might have been crumbling from within the possible trilogy's two novels: *Handmaid's Tale* to *The Testaments*; as they fail to keep the promises that brought to power, or they may be attracted from without; or both. There are no sure-fire formulas, since very little in history is inevitable. Monumentally disciplined Aunt Lydia throws a heavy stone to make weak the glass of totalitarian Gilead. From old age we were out of the need of political forces, never has our destiny. Our destiny is the formulated mirror of corrected errors not of errors being dark and widened. *The Testaments*' evaluative growth deals with the relatable experiences and expressions to what may actually happen in our actual life. That is expressed with expressive and analytical way masterly in the fictionalized world of Gilead. The possible trilogy (*The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Testaments* and the third is awaited) has a hopeful closure that is related to Margaret's view of our world with fictional and speculative qualities which inscribed the story in a world of language that could become more or less real in response to different situations in different parts of the world. Margaret many times claims that, everything that is in the story has already happened or is happening somewhere. In result the reader is guided to acknowledge the 'testaments' of the narratives as witnessing, evidence and will and consequently to take a stance if this is not the world, they would like to live in.

Totalitarian dictators have built up habit of announcing their political intentions in the form of prophecy. The most famous example is Hitler's announcement to the German Reichstag in January, 1939; I want today once again to make a prophecy, in case to Jewish financiers... succeed once more in hurling the peoples into a world war, the result will be... the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe. (Quoted from Goebbels: The Goebbels Diaries (1942-43). Ed. Louis Lochner, New York, 1948, P.148). This definition not only gave the argument its specific sharpness but also announced, in totalitarian style, the physical destruction of those whose "dying out" had just been prophesied. It happens many times in Gilead that handmaids are ordered to hanged and displayed on wall. The false nature of totalitarian attitude is as weird as debating with an intentional assassin about whether its future victim is dead or alive since the murder of that attitude in real the murderer can instantly provide proof of the acuteness of its statement. Trough the studies I find mysterious nature in totalitarian distinct. Till modern time mysteriousness have had become the first limitation for the choice of ideas or topics. Totalitarian rulers rely on the compulsion with which we can compel ourselves, for the limited mobilization of people which even they still need; this inner compulsion is the tyranny of logicity against which nothing stands but the great capacity of men to start something new. The tyranny of logicity begins with the mind's submission to logic as a never-ending process, on which man relies in order to engender his thoughts. By this submission, he surrenders his inner freedom as he surrenders his freedom of movement when he bows down to totalitarian society, which recruited them on every stance.

I always made dough men, I never made dough women, because after they were baked, I would eat them, and that made me feel I had a secret power over men.

The book '*The Testaments*' ends with the message of feminism of India, which does aim at against culture- certain issues within India's patriarchal society, such as inheritance laws, women at home after marriage in the work force, and right to political parity. Feminism in India is theorized differently while Indian feminists attempt to challenge the patriarchal structure of their society in a variety of ways. Acknowledging sexism in daily life and attempting to challenge and eliminate it through deconstructing mutually exclusive notions of femininity and masculinity as biologically determined categories open the way towards an equitable society for both men and women. The male and female dichotomy of polar opposites with the former oppressing the latter at all times is

refuted in the Indian context because it was men who initiated social reform movements against various social evils. Patriarchy is just one of the hierarchies between women within the same family are more adverse. Many Indian feminists simultaneously claim a specific “Indian” sensitivity as well as international feminist solidarity with groups and individuals worldwide. Although the late emerging feminist movement in India was influenced by western ideals. The utopia ended soon when the social and cultural ideologies and structures failed to honour the newly acquired concepts of fundamental rights and democracy. Feminists challenged the inequalities that had been established and fought to reverse them.

The novel concludes with a metafictional epilogue, described as a partial transcript at the Thirteenth Symposium on Gileadean Studies in 2197 spoken by Professor James Darcy Peixoto. He talks about the challenges in verifying the authenticity of the Ardua Hall Holograph and the two witness transcripts by Agnes and Nicole. He also speculates that Agnes and Nicole's Handmaid mother could be Offred of the previous book, though he himself admits for not being sure. He concludes by mentioning the statue that was made commemorating Becka for her actions. The manuscript that Aunt Lydia wrote as a message known as *The Ardua Hall Holograph*. Those handwritten pages were discovered inside a nineteenth-century edition of Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. In Gilead writing was forbidden for women and girls instead of the aunts. The book was purchased at a general auction by J. Grimsby Dodge, lately of Cambridge, Massachusetts. The collection was inherited by his nephew and sold it to a dealer in antiques who recognized its potential; that is why it was brought to our attention.

